

Trichinosis

What is trichinosis?

Trichinosis is a food-borne disease caused by a microscopic parasite.

Who gets trichinosis?

Anyone who eats undercooked meat of infected animals can develop trichinosis. Pork products are implicated more often than other meats.

How is trichinosis spread?

Animals such as pigs, dogs, cats, rats and many wild animals (including fox, wolf and polar bear) may harbor the parasite. When humans eat infected pork that has been improperly cooked, they become infected. Improperly cooked wild animal meat may also be responsible for infecting humans. Person-to-person spread does not occur.

What are the symptoms of trichinosis?

The symptoms usually start with fever, muscle soreness, pain and swelling around the eyes. Thirst, profuse sweating, chills, weakness and tiredness may develop. Chest pain may be experienced since the parasite may become imbedded in the diaphragm (the thin muscle separating the lungs from abdominal organs).

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

The incubation period varies depending upon the number of parasites in the meat and the amount eaten. It can range from five to 45 days but is usually 10 to 14 days.

Does past infection with trichinosis make a person immune?

Partial immunity may develop from infection.

What is the treatment for trichinosis?

A drug called mebendazole is used in treatment.

What can be the effect of not being treated for trichinosis?

Failure to treat could be fatal.

What can be done to prevent the spread of trichinosis?

The best prevention is to make sure that pork products are properly cooked. The desirable temperature is at least 150 degrees Fahrenheit. Storing infected meat in a freezer with a temperature no higher than -13 degrees Fahrenheit for 10 days will also destroy the parasite.

Revised: May 2004